

Hearings on Religious Freedom in India and Pakistan: Doctor. Mumt Az Ali Khan Prepared Testimony

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Muslims of India constitute a little more than 12% of India's total population and form the second longest Muslim population in the world, next only to Indonesia. They form a sizeable and significant vote bank and as such every political party baits them. But poverty and illiteracy have mostly neutralized the strength of their population.

Successive political parties have announced special programs for their development. But their sense of insecurity and even dependence have ruined them. Once rulers of might India, they are today not even secondary rate citizens. Their present socio-psychological conditions are quite alarming. Even though the constitution of India has guaranteed them certain special rights under Fundamental Rights, they hardly enjoy these rights because the powerful Anti-Muslim groups well supported by the administration keep them constantly harassed. Constitution gives them Religious Freedom. It is because of this that they are relatively safe and practice their religion. Normally in religious matters, there, has not been much interference from the state till recently.

It is true that the constitution guarantees equality before law. It also enables them to establish and maintain educational institutions of their choice. But in practice lot of discrimination is practiced. Permission to start minority institutions is either denied or delayed by the administration, Several restrictions and disabilities are imposed.

The mother tongue of the Muslims of India is generally Urdu language. This beautiful language is not much encouraged. Telecast of Urdu news is sometimes curbed and there are instances of riots organized by the non-urdu, non Muslim fanatic groups. In administration, Muslims feel they are discriminated. Though they account for 12% population, they get poor representation. They are generally kept out of important and sensitive wings like Home Department and Defense.

The status of Muslims under the HJP administration poses a much dreaded scene. The Central Govt. is run by National Democratic Alliance which has Bharatiya Janata party (BJP)

as the largest single group. It rules with the support of a few secular regional political parties. It has a Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a secularist though from RSS background. He is respected by Muslims too as he is the only hope for them amidst tension, suspicion and discrimination.

There are some Central Ministers who have been accused of supporting the demolition of Habri Mosque in A yodhy in India. There are cases against them pending before the designated court. Their continuance as powerful Central Ministers leads to clouds of doubts about the outcome of the court proceedings. Shiva Sena now turned into a political outfit, is adopting poisonous attitude towards Muslims in particular. The chief of the party, Mr .Hal Thackeray, hates the very shadow of Muslims. To him, all Muslims in India are suspects and they should be dumped in the Arabian sea. His party workers harass Muslims, loot their shops, destroy their economic base and curtail their religious freedom in every possible way. His party is an ally of HJP and as such HJP is forced to work against Muslims. The post Babri Mosque demolition period saw worst riots where thousands of Muslims were killed and made homeless. Bal Thackeray is the present Adlof Hitler 'Of India.

What is happening in some of the BJP ruled states amounts to reign of terror. A few major instances are presented here to illustrate how the BJP administration is treating Muslims. Of course, the treatment meted out to Christians is still worse. The National Commission for Minorities in India has indicated the Gujarat Govt. run by BJP for attacks on the right to freedom of religion of minorities, particularly Muslims. The state administration and police are biased and partisan. The state has perpetuated a sense of insecurity. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bhajarang Dal called for state bandh (means closure of all business, educational institutions and transport) in protest against killing of Hindu pilgrims in Kashmir .There were communal riots. State administration supported the rioters. Muslims were attacked, their shops were looted, houses were set on fire. A place of worship and the tomb of a saint were destroyed.

In Uttar Pradesh, a BJP ruled state, the Govt. wanted to have a new law according to which prior permission from the district authorities was a condition to build any place of worship. This was obviously against Muslims. Communalized text books which hurt the text and sentiments of the religion of Muslims were freely allowed to be used by the Govt. and the Central Govt. remained mute. The Special Reserve Police in Surat town of Gujarat state is said to have unleashed reign of terror on the Muslims, dubbing them as Pakistanis. The policemen not only supported the Hindu rioters but they themselves abated the crime. They allowed the rioters loot Muslim shops and burn their houses. Muslim students were forced to sing "Vande Mataram" and "Saraswati Vandana" and when refused they were beaten up. "Vande Mataram" is no doubt a patriotic song. Since the BJP/ RSS/ VHP force Muslims to sing this, they suspect that it is anti-islamic

song. But "Saraswati Vandana" is definitely anti-islamic to sing since Islam prohibits such songs in praise of Hindu Gods and deities.

There are a few premier research institutions such as Indian Council Social Science Research and Indian Council of Historical Research always headed by top social scientists with secular bent of mind. But now the concerned Central Minister who is from RSS background has appointed communal chiefs who have started rewriting social themes and history to propagate communal hatred against Muslims. There is hue and cry against this move by Hindu Scholars. But nothing moves the communal biased administration.

Indian Muslims are governed by their own laws relating to personal matters like marriage and divorce as sanctioned by Islam. But BJP and its allies have decided to introduce common civil code. They want to build "Ram Temple" on the site where Babri Mosque stood once. This is no doubt politically motivated. BJP has just kept all this in their hidden agenda. Right now it can not do anything as the Central Govt is a mixture of BJP, its allies and Regional Secular Parties. What happens to the minorities if BJP and its like minded groups have absolute majority is any body's guess. As long as Mr. Vajpayee is in power, BJP cannot do much damage. Attempt to review Indian Constitution is feared to be a device to make minorities subdued and be second rate citizens.

The Sangh Parivar has tremendous influence on the BJP rulers in day to day administration. It wants India to be designated as Bharat and the state be declared as a Hindu Rashtra (Nation). It wants the Ashoka Chakra in the middle of the National Flag be replaced by the letters "OM" typical Hindutva symbol. Citizenship to be conferred only to those who are patriots. National song has to be changed from the present one to "Vandemataram". If BJP has its own majority to rule the country, all these demands of the Sangh Parivar would be implemented. This would make the minorities restless and sleepless.

But let it be clear that a vast majority of the Hindus are secular and well wishers of the minorities. Similarly a vast majority of the political parties and leaders are secular. It is for this reason that the minorities are safe today. But when the BJP Govt. under pressure from Shiva Sena and the Sangh Parivar starts ruling the country on its own strength, what happens to the minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians is something that causes tension and insecurity among these people.